DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 778 CS 509 053

AUTHOR Grace, Heather J.
TITLE No Place Called Home.
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Creative Works (Literature,Drama,Fine Arts) (030) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Awareness; Economically Disadvantaged; Higher Education; *Homeless People; Interpersonal Communication; *Personal Narratives; Playwriting; *Production Techniques; *Scripts; Social Problems; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *Performance Studies (Speech)

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how the topic of homelessness was explored for a course through research and a final project which consisted of a performance of personal narratives. The paper: (1) recounts how the script was created; (2) describes and shows the actual reproduction of the script; (3) presents a brief analysis of the script; and (4) describes the staging of the performance and why it was staged in such a manner. The paper provides a background of what went into the script's creation--including personal interviews with knowledgeable experts, such as professors, volunteers and shelter operators, literature research, and perusal of published narratives of the homeless. Noting that the script had a major impact on how the performance was staged, the paper presents the voices of six speakers, each one a volunteer or a homeless person, and each one representing a different perspective on the problem. The paper points out that the script is intended to give the audience the feeling of a never-ending circle the homeless can never get away from. The paper concludes with the suggestion that further research on homelessness and its effects should be conducted. A program copy is appended. Contains six references. (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 386 778

No Place Called Home

Heather J. Grace

Central Missouri State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H J Grace

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

AS509053

Running Head: HOMELESS IN THE UNITED STATES

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

No Place Called Home

Homelessness is a problem which plagues every major city in the United States. Men, women, children, and families can all fall victims to this misfortune. Homelessness does not know any boundaries; color, race, religion, creed, gender, and age are not determinants as to whether one will live in a shelter, on a park bench, under a bridge, or down an alley way.

Counting the homeless has been a major problem; no one study has come up with the same statistic. Baum and Burns have found that many studies' numbers range from 200,000 to 3 million homeless people in the United States in any given month (1993, 247). Another problem the so called experts and government officials can not agree on is the cause of homelessness. The most recent upsurge of the last fifteen years has been blamed on "Reagan's immediate moves to impose major cuts in social programs and his intense efforts to dismantle the safety net of social services..." (Baum & Burns, 1993, 133). Landes, Foster, and Caldwell indicated the upsurge was created by "[t]he decline in the availability of affordable housing..." (1991,11).

This paper was completed to receive partial fulfillment for a course

entitled *Performance of Special Topics in Health Communications*. The focus of the paper is to explore the topic of homelessness through a performance project of personal narratives. The paper will give information on: how the script was created, describe and show the actual reproduction of the script, present a brief analysis of the script, and describe of how the performance will be staged and why it is staged in this manner.

Through my research on the topic of homelessness, I found that homelessness is not simply being without a place to stay, rather it is being without a home of one's own due to financial instability or poverty. Homelessness does not only afflict black and white middle aged men; however, it affects women, men, and children of all ages, races, religions, creeds, and nationalities.

The script was created through personal interviews with Dr. Jerry Windsor, who is a professor at Central Missouri State University, phone calls and discussions with volunteers and shelter operators, literature research, and published narratives. I collected information from all of these resources and then read through each piece. While reading through each item, I focused on the content of it and what type of message the

piece would give the audience. An important feature, which determined where each item would be placed in the script, was whether or not the piece was consisted with the production concept. The production concept was to look at the different views particular individuals have about how homelessness relates to them. The different attitudes were placed together with the statement "no place called home".

The script had a major impact on how the performance was staged. This performance of personal narratives, on the topic of homelessness, was staged using boxes and newspapers as props. Paper was placed on the floor, on top of the boxes, and inside the boxes. The introduction and conclusion were the same piece; as I read them I was standing up front, close to the audience. This piece was staged closest to the audience because hearing statistics is a common occurance and most people just shut them out. The transition between each piece was "[n]o place called home". I said this as I walked to the next box. The volunteer's experience was at the next closest box to the audience, off to the left. This narrative was performed close to the audience because this character helped the homeless, but is not homeless. The next move was to the far back of the stage, against the wall. This narrative came from a homeless middle aged

man, and it was performed at the back of the stage farthest away from the audience because this man has the least in common with the audience. The next piece was my own creation because I could not obtain a personal narrative from a child, the positioning on the stage was at the same place that the beginning and ending pieces were performed. The last piece, before repeating the introduction again, was a poem which was performed off to one side about half stage. This piece was performed closer to the audience because it was reality with low threat. The conclusion will be performed closest to the audience in the middle of the stage. Throughout the performance a tape was playing at low volume; it had statistics being repeated in a monotone manner.

No Place Called Home

Speaker #1:(every day voice, serious) A man will die in a park on the north side of Chicago this winter- frozen stiff. A woman and her children will seek refuge from their home, victims of domestic violence. A young runaway, tired and short of money, will quickly become easy prey for those seeking to exploit for financial or sexual reasons.

In any given major city today there are an estimated 25,000 men, women, young people, and families who live on the streets. Stereotypes of

bag ladies and skid row bums persist side-by-side with exposes of the new homeless.

Transition: (soft, depressed) No place called home.

Speaker #2: (female, proud to be able to help) Ever since our church opened an overnight emergency shelter, I have volunteered two nights a month. I look forward to conversations we are able to have with the street people who sleep in our shelter.

This year when the sign-up sheet was circulated for volunteers, I decided to volunteer for Christmas Eve. This night has always seemed to me to be a significant time for the shelter to be open, since we remember the story of Mary and Joseph not being able to find room at the inn.

I arrived at the church Christmas Eve in a very unhappy mood. My family was angry with me for not being with them on Christmas Eve. Because of some recent problems between us, I was hostile and unfairly critical in my comments. It was not a good holiday experience.

After most of our guests had been provided with a bed for the night, I started to feel better. Then a knock came at the back door. Even though it was against shelter rules to let someone in after midnight, I could not

bring myself to ignore the knocking on Christmas Eve. When I opened the door a very old and very smelly woman stood before me. She pushed her way into the basement demanding a bed for the night. How quickly I forgot my inspiration for volunteering on Christmas Eve. How quickly the words, "There's no room for you here," came to my lips. How angry I became at this unpleasant sight.

But then I looked at the woman again. How much her frail, aging face resembled my own grandmother. And then I remembered that we operate this shelter so that people like her do not have to spend the night on the street. I attempted to apologize and direct her to a bed.

She reached into her pocket and gave me an apple she had saved from a special holiday food distribution earlier that day. "Don't you worry, honey, you are forgiven," she said before lying down.

Transition: (soft, depressed) No place called home.

Speaker #3: (monotone, quiet) I've spent more time in Lexington, Kentucky, than anywhere, I guess. The homeless situation there is just like everywhere else: they overlook it. Like it's common to see someone sleepin' on the sidewalk.

I usually sleep outside. There's this bridge where a railroad crossing

runs under a main road. We've dug it out so there's this ledge- 'bout five people sleep there any given time. Usually in a small camp like that people watch out for each other, but you've still got your problems with alcohol and stealin' and that.

I try to stay away from soup lines and depend on myself as much as possible. I usually kill my own food: rabbits, squirrels, stuff of that nature. You build box traps, there's snares- a lot of different ways about it. Catch a lot of fish. In Lexington the hills are right there.

When that don't work you got to do what you have to to survive. I've got to the point where I don't care what the next man thinks about me, I'm going to survive... soup lines, dig in dumpsters, eat food out of garbage cans, steal, rob a time or two- didn't want to, you know, but got so I had to.

Any fast food joints got good dumpsters usually. Right around closing time they throw out everything they've got stashed for the day. Say like McDonald's closes at 10:00 at night. You be there at 9:00 sitting at the curb. When the guy comes out with the white sack you taclke it: "Yeah Buddy, I'll take that." Half of them understand and are cool. Then again half of 'em don't. Like I've had the guy throw it over me into the

dumpster, make me scrounge. Then the police pull up while I'm in there, lookin' for it. "What are you doing?" "Uhh, I'm looking for food. What's it look like?" "You can't do that." "Why? They threw it away. I'm hungry. Why can't I eat it?"

Transition: (soft, depressed) No place called home.

Speaker #4 : (every day voice, serious) A child's narrative was an item on my to get list. I wanted to use a narrative from a child because I wanted you to become aware of the affects homelessness has on children. I was unable to obtain a child's narrative because the shelters I contacted said the children's parents are afraid to allow anyone to interview their children because they fear losing the child to a foster home.

Transition: (soft, depressed) No place called home.

Speaker #5: (sincere, pleading) I watched old Joe stagger, a brown bag was in his hand Just another homeless fellow in this our troubled land. I see his malnurished features, dirt on his clothes, And yes there is some odor wherever old Joe goes.

So I buy Joe a sandwich and I sit with him a while. Though keeping such odd company hardly is in style. How was your day I asked as sincerely as I can, but old Joe eats in silence with his shaking hands.

Joe wiped his craggley whiskers and looked up at me. His eyes were bloodshot and yellow, how could he see. He fixed me in his attention as a peace found his face. He said he had a memory of her perfume and her lace.

He said her life had been taken in one tragic fall, his unborn child was lost, he couldn't take it all. Said a life can be changed in just a twinkle of time, And that I should be grateful for living one's of mine.

Oh Joe what would it take to get you sober and alert. I could understand your pain, it's no wonder that you hurt. Joe held out his stained fingers and his wrinkled hand. Said we each have a story, every woman and every man.

If you care to share feelings, can accept a little pain, one day with the homeless, it will never be the same. Just listen to a story and give a gift of your time, and you will be grateful for every soul and every mind. [sic]

Transition:(soft, depressed) No place called home.

Speaker #6: (every day voice, serious) A man will die in a park on the north side of Chicago this winter- frozen stiff. A woman and her children will seek refuge from their home, victims of domestic violence. A young runaway, tired and short of money, will quickly become easy prey for

those seeking to expliot for financial or sexual reasons.

In any given major city there are an estimated 25,000 men, women, young people, and families who live on the streets. Stereotypes of bag ladies and skid row bums persist side-by-side with exposes of the new homeless,(emphasize) with no place called home. (See appendix for program.)

The script consisted of these pieces because there is no one way to view homelessness. The use of the tape was to give the audience a choice of who they were going to listen to, either the performer or the tape. Most people hear statistics everyday and usually do not pay attention to them. The opening and closing pieces of the performance were the same to show the audience the appearance of the continuous cycle homeless individuals face when struggling their way back into mainstream America. Once in the homeless position, it is almost impossible to get out of it and back on one's feet. The volunteer's experience was placed second because this individual is closer to the way most Americans can relate to the homeless problem. The homeless man's narrative was placed in the middle of the performance to display the deepest hole and the center of the problem. The information on homeless children was placed after the homeless man's to

express the hardships many homeless families face; not only do they not was used in the script to introduce true feelings from a man who had had it all. This poem was written by a man who works with the homeless and is trying to get other people involved with the homeless shelters. This script is intended to give the audience the feeling of a never ending circle the homeless can never get away from.

Homelessness is a circular lifestyle which is difficult to pull out of once entangled in it. The major problems with homelessness are: no agreeable statistic has been determined for the number of homeless, and none of the government officials or experts can agree on one specific cause. The performance script's main focus was to introduce personal narratives and pieces of information to the audience in a manner which brings them to a closer understanding of the topic. Further research on homelessness and it's effects should be conducted. However, in the future getting the homeless involved with the changes needed to move them out of the continuous lifestyle would give these people a sense of self worth, and possibly the motivation to make their life prosper. A longitudinal study of the effects of homelessness needs to be conducted to determine how people's lifestyle changes affect the person's thoughts and identity.

Appendix

Program Copy

HOME NEWS

Edition I | Wednesday, March 30, 1994 | 4 Star Publication

- There are anywhere from 200,000 to 3 million homeless in the U.S. in any given month.
- Approximately 15 percent of the homeless are single women.
- About 28 percent of the homeless are families which include children.
- Between one-half and two-thirds of the homeless have completed high-school; about one-third have attended college.

Catholic Charaties: 816-221-4377
Meals on Wheels: 816-747-3107
Shelter Services:
KCMO: 816-756-2769

Baum and Burns' new book was released just recently. The title is *A Nation in Denial: The truth about homelessness.* The truth is the people who think it can't happen to them- it does.

Street Lives: An oral history of homeless Americans has sold over a million copies since being on the shelf. Vanderstaay, the author, wrote the book in 1992 to inform America of the real tragedies the homeless face. "It does happen in the United States", Vanderstaay says.

In an interview with Dr. J. L. Windsor, new surprising links to residents in the Warrensburg area abusing low income housing. Residents in the Warrensburg area are using housing which was supposed to be allocated for the homeless. There have been reports which indicate that college students are lying on the applications to receive cheaper housing.

Landes, Foster, and Caldwell's book, which was published in 1991 entitled *Homeless in America: How could it happen here?*, sold out of copies in 2 days. The publisher just recently filled the backlog orders.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Works Cited

Baum, A. S. & Burns, D. W. (1993). A nation in denial: The truth about homelessness. Boulder: Westview.

Interfaith Council for the Homeless. (1987, June). Helping the homeless: God's word in action. Chicago.

Landes, A., Foster, C. D., & Caldwell, B. B. (1991). Homeless in America: How could it happen here? Philadelphia: Information Plus.

Windsor, J. L. Personal interview on the topic of homelessness. (February 14, 1994).

Windsor, J. L. Poem (November 1993). Old Joe.

Vanderstaay, S. (1992). Street lives: An oral history of homeless Americans. Philadelphia: New Society.